2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

756 534 The Siberian single-headed drum, to which type the Yakut drum belongs, ranks high among primitive musical instruments. The Yakut very seldom use it for amusement. It is primarily an instrument for shamanistic performances.

The drum is very skilfully handled for ritual purposes. It is held with the wider part of the oval upward. The volume of sound depends on the distance from the rim. The farther from the rim the stroke falls, the deeper is the sound.

The Siberian drum has no appliances for tightening its membrane, as is the case with two-headed drums, or with some kinds of tamborines; therefore its sound effects may be distinguished rather by the time and force than by their pitch. This defect may be overcome to some degree by frequent warming of the drum.

533 756 In the intonation of the shaman's voice all sound elements, volume, tempo, and pitch may be found. His voice is particularly strong when he strives to inhale from the patient the malevolent beings causing the sickness. Then his voice resembles the cries of a man struggling with a deadly danger.

According to Vitashevsky, the pitch intervals are smaller than those of our musical system. After recording the Yakut songs he tried to reproduce them on a violin, but the Yakut did not recognize them.

● 755 *A Shamanistic Performance.* Vitashevsky gives a vivid description of a performance at which he was present.[1] He came too late to see its initiation, called *oloxxo oloror* (on the seat he is seated) and, he understood, at this point the shaman's voice and the drum beats should be weak and almost listless. When he entered the earth hut the shaman was sitting on a small bank in its eastern corner, so that he had to pass between him and the fireplace. The shaman wore his shamanistic coat and his assistant dried the hut master's drum by the fire. The shaman asked for a tobacco pipe. He inhaled the smoke several times and asked for the drum and stick which were given to him. He rose, walked a few steps, and jerking his shoulders and head up and down, he tried to beat the drum, but rejected it because it was wet. He asked that his own drum be dried. This was done very quickly. Evidently his drum was already dry.

Now began the second or preliminary stage, called *mäñiyär* and *sürgüyar*[2] when the shaman searched for the direction in which to locate

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[1] Vitashevsky, N. A., Observations of Performances of Yakut Shamans (*Publications du Musée d'Anthropologie et d'Ethnographie de l'Empereur Pierre le Grand Près l'Academie des Sciences de Russie*, vol. 5, pp. 165–196, Petrograd, 1918, in Russian), 177.

[2] These are called shamanistic objects, as for instance, *jalbyr*, a willow with three branches to which hair from the tail of a white horse is tied. The *jalbyr* is used instead of a drum by some shamans and serves as a horse for their journey to the subterranean world.

2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

the evil spirit that captured the sick man's soul. And, indeed, at times he stopped beating and gazed into the distance. In the beginning of the act the shaman beat the drum slightly and sang in a low voice, but gradually his voice and the drum beatings rose to a climax and the shaman turned his face to the southern window of the hut. The act lasted from fifteen to twenty minutes. During the performance the shaman imitated the neighing of a horse and the cry of some bird. 755

The third act consisted in inhaling from the sick man the evil spirits causing the illness, and in dispatching them to the south. The shaman had to dispatch four evil spirits. First the shaman sat on the floor behind the fireplace, not far from the entrance, holding in his left hand a *jalbyr* (see above) which he stretched out in the direction of the patient. Gradually, still in a sitting position, he moved toward the sick man, singing louder and shaking his head more and more. At a distance of about a meter from the sick man he rose from the floor and sat on a bank prepared for him. He continued to cry out his incantations, touching the sick man with his *jalbyr*. This movement is called *jalbiyal*. Slowly the shaman rose from the bank and, dropping the *jalbyr*, bent over the sick man. In a powerful voice he commanded his spirits to fulfil his order and to pass from the patient. He pretended to swallow them in order to dispatch them to their dwelling places. To this end, he ran out to the yard and after dispatching the spirits to the "south" he fainted. He was taken up and carried into the hut, quite exhausted. Then the shaman started for the "upper" world and brought back one of the souls, the *kut*, of the sick man which had deserted him, having been frightened off by the evil spirits. The shaman looked around to see whether any evil spirit was left near the patient. Once more he pretended to start for the "upper" world and he fainted when he returned to this world. He was revived by his assistant and the shaman sang his last incantation. This was the final act of the performance.

Vitashevsky was unable to record the text of the performance for the following reasons: it was almost dark in the hut; in spite of his perfect knowledge of the Yakut language many expressions in the performance were incomprehensible to him; the use of a phonograph to record the text would be prohibited by the shaman or otherwise influence the performance. When Vitashevsky invited the shaman to his hut for an interview the latter declined the invitation, saying that a shamanistic performance was too serious a subject for futile curiosity. The shaman, learning of Vitashevsky's presence during his performance, said that it would fail to benefit the sick man. Sieroszevski refers in his 123

6: Sauer--119-121 G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut-1-2
116, 755, 782, 776

"When a sick Socha sends for a shaman to appease the wrath of the evil spirits that torment him, the sorcerer takes a switch, ties a few hairs from the mane of a horse to the end of it, walks and jumps about the sick person, waves his switch, and conjures the demons to appear and relate the cause of their tormenting him, and how they are to be appeased.

After some time has passed in this invocation, he starts, pretends to see the spirits, and, listening to their admonition for some [120] time, turns to the patient, and tells him whence the spirits came; that it was with a view of destroying him, but that they might be induced to accept as a sacrifice, instead of him, a fat mare or a cow, mentioning the particular colour. This is immediately procured; for whoever has one answering the description readily gives it.

The offering being procured, the shaman dresses himself in full form, walks with his switch to the possessed, embraces him, and commands the demons to leave him; then, rising in great agitation, he suddenly springs upon the offering, raving and shouting as much as he possibly can: the beast now starting, and being restless, is a proof of the pain that it endures from the demon.

The following morning the sacrifice is led to the place appointed, which is always on a rising ground at the entrance into a wood. Four poles are driven into the ground, on which they erect a stage covered with twigs, wheron the offering is slain and skinned.

The flesh is dressed and eaten on the spot; the bones collected, wrapped up in the twigs that were on the scaffold, put inside the skin of the animal, and stuck at the top of some tree on the spot: if the sacrifice was to the aërial spirits, the head is directed upwards; if to the spirits of the pit, the head is looking downwards. The sorcerer then, arrayed in his magic robes, takes his tambour, and begins his formal spells; beating his tambour, raving, jumping, and using an unintelligible jargon in the most extravagant manner; his long hair hanging over his face, he conjures the spirit of the sacrifice to its demons, and the demons to their proper place of retirement; seems, several times during his incantations, to faint, during which paroxysms he receives the inspired power of prognosticating the fate of the diseased, and the day either of his restoration to health, or of his death. If [121] he prove mistaken, it is not regarded as arising from want of skill, but the unacceptableness of the sacrifice, which is occasionally renewed till he dies or recovers.

If a shaman acquaints any family that some demon is intent on inflicting a punishment, offerings are made to avert the evil; not of live beasts, but the rich skins of animals, which are hung up in a conspicuous part of the hut, and buried with the owner when he dies."

15: Popov -- 259 [2] E-3 (no date) 1933 Yakut
116, 326, 755, 841

"Dolgan [RCH: nomadic tribes of Yakutized Tungus] blacksmiths always work some distance away from the habitations, in a special tent which must not be polluted. If a menstruating woman enters or if she steps on the tools, both she and the blacksmith become covered with sores. To heal these it is necessary to smear them with the blood of a white reindeer, or rub them with the surface of an anvil, saying, 'Please cure these sores.'"

particular by the poorer people who had no cattle, although it was also a secondary diet for the wealthier groups in the population. In the summer, people used to eat fresh fish boiled in water or slightly fried (carp and other small fish), on spikes or in a frying pan (the scales were removed but the innards were left untouched). A great deal of fish was stocked up for the winter, pickled in bark-lined pits; the acidified and half-rotten fish—syma—was then frozen and used to make butugas as a substitute for milk tar. The more valuable types of fish, particularly sterlet, white salmon, and whitefish of various types, were consumed in the raw, frozen form.

With rare exceptions, meat was eaten only in the wealthier households. Most highly valued was horsemeat, but even among the rich it was not served too often. Beef was eaten more frequently. The meat of various other animals, especially in the northern hunting regions, was also eaten. It was usually boiled (though attempts were made not to overcook it), and sometimes roasted in the old manner on wooden spikes. Fat was specially highly valued. The carcasses of slaughtered cattle were kept for the winter in frozen form. The Yakuts did not eat certain types of wild animals and birds—beasts of prey, sea gulls, ravens, cuckoos and owls—and they refused to eat the brains of domestic animals. During the 19th century, under Russian influence, bread began to be eaten and later salt, sugar and tea became part of the diet of the Yakuts. Dealers brought in vodka to the ulusy.

Hygiene

The living conditions of the Yakuts before the Revolution were extremely unhygienic. As a result of the filth, overcrowding and stagnant air in the yurt with its earthen floor and cattle-shed right next door conditions were completely abnormal. Furthermore, the Yakuts, particularly in winter, rarely washed themselves, and the washing of clothes was practically unknown.

Under the circumstances it is not surprising that there were frequent epidemics. Skin diseases were particularly rampant, and mange, ringworm, ulcers, and so on were due to the permanent contamination of the skin. Eye diseases (trachoma, etc.) were very common, particularly among the older people, a large number of whom lost their sight. According to the 1915 census, there were 110 blind people per 10,000 Yakuts. True leprosy existed in some of the damp, marshy regions; isolation shelters for lepers were arranged in out of the way spots. Tuberculosis was quite common.

Nervous disorders were widespread in the northern regions of Yakutiya, particularly among women, which was due to the difficult living conditions, exhausting work, and to a number of women's diseases, etc. The nervous disorders took such forms as Arctic hysteria, the so-called menerik, which is something like epilepsy; the sick woman throws a fit during which she shouts and raves until she falls asleep exhausted. Another, similar nervous disorder was *amyrpax*; the symptoms are an unconscious, involuntary imitation of anything which frightens or astonishes the sufferer.

The Yakuts had no rational method of treating these ailments. They often used primitive domestic cures such as cauterizing, licking the pus from sores and so on. It was usual during sickness to resort to quack doctors and shamans.

Social Structure

The social structure of the Yakuts, as it had developed by the time of the October Revolution, was a peculiar mishmash of complex forms of